

SCENERY AND DECORATIONS.

THE THEATRES.

Drury Lane Theatre.—Once more this house has been restored to its position as the national theatre, and has been made a fitting place for the purpose. It has been thoroughly re-decorated throughout, and that in the short space of eleven days. The ceiling is painted after the style of the age of Louis XVI. in compartments, consisting principally of representative alcoves; alternating with which are placed shields; and in the decoration of the ceiling are introduced figures representing the elements of the drama,—Silence and Despair, Fear and Fanaticism, Prudence and Counsel, Avarice and Prodigality, Friendship and Serenity. The lower and dress circles are divided into panels and pilasters, the ground of which is white, and the medallions and enrichments of gold, illuminated with blue. The second and third circles are decorated with blue, white, and gold, forming draperies, the upper one in white and gold; the under one with blue, white and gold, and with gold fringe. There is a handsome new chandelier too, and the appearance of the theatre is very creditable to Mr. Hurtwitz, by whom the whole of the decorations have been executed. It is a little prim, and cold, resulting partly from the absence of textile hangings, the fronts of the boxes taking their shape. It may be useful to mention that the whole of what appears to be gilded decorations are of this stamped brass, by the use of which great saving of time was effected. Of the pieces produced and the work on the stage we will speak hereafter, and, in the meanwhile, express a hope that Mr. Bohn's endeavours may be responded to by the public.

The Haymarket Theatre.—People look as naturally now for extravaganzas at Christmas as for mince pies; and if the latter, according to the old superstition, give "happy days" according to the number eaten, the former quite as certainly give merry nights to those who are willing to be so amused. They fall within our province more in respect of the opportunities they afford to the scene painter, the machinist, and the costumier, than as literary compositions, although we have before now found in them comments and advice not useless to our readers. It has amused us, too, more than once, to see rhyming lines, given by us from these sources, finding their way into succeeding architectural books, and taking their place amongst the stock quotations of early essayists. The new piece at the Haymarket is founded, by the Messrs. Brough, on a tale by Count Hamilton, and is not very reasonable, is, at all events, very amusing. Buckstone is very funny, Mrs. Fitzwilliam very clever, and Mrs. Buckingham very handsome in it. With the scenery Mr. Morris has taken more pains than usual. The first scene, a hall of "twisted columns," illuminated from behind, is not unarchitectural; and the last scene of the first act, moonlight on water and mountain, is very good. "The Man of Law," a pleasant comedy, very well acted, alternates for the first part of the evening with Gay's "Beggar's Opera," and its charming melodies,—a picture of a period when our prison system was even worse than it is now.

The Lyceum Theatre.—Another of those great successes which author, scene painter, and manager unite here periodically to attain, has been achieved at this present Christmas. *The Prince of Happy Land, or the Fawn in the Forest*, by Mr. Planché, is equal to the best of its author's earlier efforts, and superior to some of his later. It is written with a sparkling and pure pen, and is full of wit from the beginning to end. The opening song, charmingly sung by Madame Vestris, pays a well-deserved compliment so neatly that we are led to quote it. Thus it runs:—

"Once on a time ('tis always so
The charming fairy tales begin),
People of all sorts pined you know,
Towers and dungeons in,
For monarchs in that bygone age—
I beg you will remark—
Consider'd 'twas a maxim sage
To keep folks in the dark.

Once on a time—in long ago—
And soon I hope they'll change their plan,
And upon every subject throw
As much light as they can.
Indeed I'm told a Royal Pair,
With policy more sound,
A Palace built of Crystal fair
To let in light all round."

The scenery, by Messrs. Beverley and Meadows, is singularly beautiful; as, for example, the second scene in the first act, "Point Lace Chamber, in the Tower of Tapers," and the last scene "The Golden Pinery," which is one of those gorgeous displays of gold and colour and machinery and pretty faces, to which we have been for some time accustomed here. The gem in this department, however, is unquestionably the closing scene of the first act, "Peerless Pool and Pleasure Gardens," wherein the water and air remind one of some of Turner's finest pictures. Some morsels of blue and red in the shape of sitting children are introduced with admirable effect; the amber dresses of the ballet *troupe* harmonize beautifully; and the whole is as fine a work of art of its kind as was ever produced.

BITS FROM AMERICA.

A new Building Material.—The Californian papers contain an account of a new building material which has recently been discovered near Benicia, and which, they think, will be extensively used for building purposes in that country. Several houses have already been constructed of it, and the pliability with which it can be worked, the ease with which it can be transported to market, its durability and its power of resistance against fire, will, it is thought, render it hereafter very popular as a material to be used in the construction of houses. It is a kind of sand stone, and can be wrought into different shapes more easily than oak. By subsequent exposure to the weather it becomes exceedingly hard, and pieces which have been tested by fire, have been little if any affected by it. Its colour is light brown, and when properly worked with the hammer, it gives to a building an exceedingly ornamental appearance. Those who have used it say that a house can be built of it more cheaply than of brick.

Safety of Railroads.—The Vermont Legislature, at its late session, passed a capital Act, designed to protect the lives of travellers on railroads. It forbids the employment of conductors, engineers, brakemen, or switchmen, "who shall make use of intoxicating liquors as a beverage," and the employment of such a person, with the knowledge of the president, superintendent, or any of the directors, exposes the company to prosecution, and to a fine of 300 dols. to 3,000 dols. besides being liable for all damages that may result.

Steam Excavator for Digging Guano.—Mr. John Souther, proprietor of the Globe Works, South Boston, has just completed the construction of one of Otis's steam excavators. This machine is to be shipped to the coast of Peru, South America, for the purpose of excavating the substance known as guano. The excavator is capable of taking up three shovelfuls of loose gravel in five minutes, the shovel holding from a yard to a yard and one-half cubic. It is estimated that with it two men can easily perform the same work, in the same time, as would require one hundred and fifty common labourers.

Mr. Barnum's Villa, at Bridgeport, Connecticut, is described as being of a composite order, of the Byzantine, Moorish, and Turkish styles of architecture. Its entire front is one hundred and twenty-four feet, the wings being thrown off irregularly, with domed conservatories at each extremity. The main building consists of three stories, each having broad verandahs supported by pillars, surmounted by minarets. Upon entering the hall, about its centre springs a winding staircase, with a carved balustrade of black walnut, which, gradually contracting, winds to the observatory in the central dome; the niches of the staircase are embellished with marble statuary imported from Florence; opposite to the base of the staircase, large sliding doors open into a drawing-room, the walls of which are covered

with paper, the principal panels of which represent the four seasons; the ceiling is of arabesque mouldings of white and gold; the mantels of Italian statuary marble; the furniture is of rosewood; the dining-room walls are painted in dark English oak, the panels of which represent the fine arts, Music, Painting, and Poetry; the ceiling has gilded mouldings; the furniture is of black walnut. In the Chinese library the walls are covered with Chinese landscapes in oil; the bookcase and furniture are Chinese.

LAYING OUT GROUND.

THE GROVES OF BROMPTON.

IN laying out building plans for new sections of the town, little attention is ordinarily bestowed on any consideration other than productiveness, or the greatest possible amount of ground rent. Too frequently on large estates this is the main object, and to such an extent is it carried, that the mean character of the houses often mars the general aspect of a quarter, and thus foils the intention of a greedy proprietor, who loses in value more than he gains in extent.

Examples might be cited in every district of the growing suburbs, but it would be invidious to quote them: the instance, however, of a few cases of the contrary tendency, may illustrate the policy of not being too niggard of area, and of the much greater benefit that proprietors acquire by allowing abundant space for squares and ornamental expanses.

Belgrave and Eaton squares on one estate; Hyde-park Gardens and the Terraces (Oxford, Cambridge, and Westbourne) on another, have enhanced the rentals, as well as the building interests far beyond what closely-compacted streets and narrow frontages could possibly yield.

It is true that all localities cannot be dedicated to great buildings or first and second-rate houses; but even of the minor class of dwellings better arrangement might be made than the packing together of 17 or 18 feet frontages, in uniform consecutive ranges, as tasteless in the external appearance, as comfortable in internal accommodation, and transitory in permanence.

When the row is numbered, decorated, and tenanted, the builder's view is attained: he parts with his interest, which is but for a sixty, seventy, or eighty years' lease: the annuitant at 7 per cent. succeeds him; and ultimately the landlord acquires a ramshead property, calculated to endure possibly as long as the fashion that has passed before a matured tenure establishes a fair property in tenements.

The seeming liberality of space, such as squares, crescents, and the like, ought to be carried out in the small as well as the large class of houses. Semi-detached or commodious premises always produce more rent, and not only that, but a better order of tenant—more permanent because more satisfied. Besides, the rents are larger just in proportion to the increased comforts and consequent greater respectability of the vicinage.

As to the quality of architecture in general, that is regulated by the length of the lease, and is just calculated to bide its time. As the custom of short leasing grows, so the frailty of structures becomes more frail. It might be worth consideration whether the possessor of suburban acres would not find his advantage in doubling the present extent of term from 70 to 150 years.

On the existing mode, however, whether for sixty or more years, the policy of building first of all good structures; secondly, commodious curtilages; thirdly, wide causeways; and fourthly, open spaces, with *verdure and plantations*—is too palpable to need comment.

A glance at the massive dull ranges of Harley, Wimpole, Wigmore, Welbeck, and the numerous other quadrangular ranges of that dingy locality, will prove the force of these observations; and in laying out the beautiful and (in position) incomparable vacant spaces as yet unoccupied, it is to be hoped that the architect who lays down the ground plan will have due regard to modern improvements in the varied disposition of squares and gardens, of *refined isolated*